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THE ACHILLES HEEL OF GERMANY

BY ARCHIBALD R. COLQUHOUN.

A POLITICAL prophecy in epigrammatic form which is frequently quoted in Europe declares that the twentieth century "belongs to the Germans." At the present time, when German diplomacy is so obviously and dramatically triumphant, most people would give an unquestioning assent to this proposition. The extraordinary progress of the German nation in the comparatively short period since its unification, the success of its diplomacy and the preponderance of its influence, backed by an enormous army and a growing navy, in the councils of Europe seem to point to an uninterrupted period of Teutonic success—a triumphal march leading on to the hegemony of Europe. This predominance has been achieved under the leadership of Prussia—Prussian policy, Prussian ideas have dominated the Fatherland—and modern Germany is, in fact, the creation of Frederick the Great. Bismarck, who is often credited with being the originator, was, in fact, really the reviver or interpreter of the State policy of Frederick. The principles which his master laid down the Iron Chancellor improved on. Take, for instance, these maxims from Frederick's great work (written in French) on "The Principles of Prussian Government":

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"Constant attention must be paid to hiding as far as possible one's plans and ambitions. Secrecy is an indispensable virtue in politics as well as in the art of war.

"If possible, the Powers of Europe should be made envious and be set against one another, in order to give occasion for a *coup* when opportunity offers.

"It is one of the first political principles to endeavor to become an ally of that one of one's neighbors who may become most dangerous to one's State. For that reason we have an alliance with Russia, and thus we have our back free as long as it lasts."

The determining factor in Prussian foreign policy was, of course, the geographical position of the kingdom. Having its origin in the military settlements of the Teutonic knights on the shores of the Baltic, right in the centre of the Slav population, which extended westward as far as the Elbe in the neighborhood of Hamburg, Prussia was military from its birth, and, as Frederick said, it had to be "*toujours en vedette*."

The eighteenth century found Prussia hemmed in on one side by the Slav kingdom of Poland. Frederick induced Maria Theresa (in 1772) to join Prussia and Russia in despoiling that kingdom, and accordingly each of the great Powers took a slice of territory contiguous with its own. Twenty years later, in 1793, Russia and Prussia rounded off their territory with further acquisitions, leaving the kingdom a mere slip in the centre with nominal independence; but even this was forfeited in 1795, when Austria joined in the final partition. The kingdom of Poland disappeared and the king retired with a pension to St. Petersburg. The opposition of the Poles was by no means as strenuous as might have been expected from their past and their subsequent history: indeed, a faint pretence was made of consulting their wishes as to their annexation to neighboring states. In order to understand this apparent indifference we must recollect that the annexing Powers represented governments rather than nations, and that the Poles were, for the most part, dissatisfied with their own government. No idea of their denationalization was presented, and indeed under the crowns of all three annexing Powers they might have expected to find liberty and autonomy.

The greater part of the Polish nation found itself attached to Russia, and as the eighteenth century drew to a close the rise of Napoleon raised a fresh vista for the Poles. They saw, once more, the possibility of uniting their severed sections and regain-

ing their lost provinces. Poland, before the first partition, had spread from the Baltic nearly to the Black Sea and from the Dnieper, on the East, to close on the Oder, on the West. French sympathy had been poured out for the Slavs in that burst of sentiment which followed the writings of Rousseau; and Napoleon, meaning to utilize the Poles against Austria and Russia, played upon their ambitions. The Poles schemed and plotted and hoped and fought brilliantly, and when their betrayal was at last plain they found they had squandered almost everything in this forlorn hope. Even in Napoleon's last campaign against Russia, after it had become apparent that Polish dreams of a revival of their ancient kingdom were illusory, the Poles fought desperately for him, and of the large number who went out it is estimated that not more than a few thousands returned. The Napoleonic creation of a semi-independent Poland took the shape of the so-called Duchy of Warsaw, which was carved out of Austrian and Prussian Poland. With his downfall the greater part of this Duchy was attached to Russia, under the title of the "Kingdom of Poland," with a separate government. Posen, however, was returned to Prussia, Frederick William III promising its citizens every consideration and liberty if they acquiesced quietly in their incorporation within his kingdom. Russia and Prussia now found themselves with that long coterminous frontier of which we shall speak later—not the frontier designed by Frederick the Great, but the one consequent on the redistribution after the Napoleonic wars. Polish independence survived, however, right into the middle of the nineteenth century, in the small neutralized free republic of Cracow. That ancient city, the centre of Polish tradition, became the rallying-point of Polish nationality, and from the first the great Powers were determined to crush it. As early as 1835 it was determined that Cracow should be incorporated in Austrian Poland, and in 1846 a rising in Galicia gave the desired opportunity and the republic was occupied and annexed.

Meanwhile the "Kingdom of Poland," under Russian rule, had also become dangerous. Had the more reasonable policy of later years prevailed at first, this "congressional kingdom" might have been the groundwork for Polish liberties. As it was, the Poles never abandoned the wild hopes raised in their Napoleonic days. They would accept no national ideal short of complete independence and the recovery of their former pro-

portions. In 1831 there was a futile and disastrous rising which ruined the chances of the congressional kingdom. The year of revolution (1848) found the Poles in revolt in more than one part, following the example of the rest of Europe; but, after 1849, until 1862, the more moderate party was dominant. Their policy was one of compromise. Hitherto no specially repressive measures had been directed against the Poles, but repression, of which Metternich had so long been the protagonist, was specially directed against all the peoples who had become infected with liberalism and cherished ideas of national freedom. The policy of Russia at the middle of last century was by no means in favor of severe and repressive treatment; and, in 1862, Gortchakoff, as the head of the "Old Russia" party and opposing the German or "Young Russia" party, was anxious to try conciliation on the Poles. He sent a Polonophil, the Grand Duke Constantine, as Viceroy, and a Pole of strong patriotic views, the Marquis Vielopolski, as Minister of Education, Justice and Public Worship. Vielopolski did not belong to either the "White" (or Conservative) Polish party or to the "Reds" (who were revolutionaries), but was in reality ahead of his times, believing that Poland could only secure the liberty of her people by recognizing Russian supremacy and working for autonomy and freedom of national speech and religion. This moderate programme did not meet the views of either party, and the conciliatory efforts of the Grand Duke and Vielopolski were met with attempts at assassination. Finally, the "Reds" became so influential that in the following year (1863) a great revolution broke out—the most brilliant and heroic, the most desperate and the last, of Polish efforts to regain their lost freedom. Foredoomed to failure, the revolt was prolonged by the almost superhuman efforts of the Poles.

During the period 1859-62, while ambassador at St. Petersburg, Bismarck had been closely studying the Slav question, and especially the Polish side of it, and, imbued as he was with the older Prussian traditions, had certainly thrown in the weight of his influence against the conciliation policy of Gortchakoff. When that policy had proved so total a failure, and Russian Poland for a time held her conquerors at bay, Bismarck came to the assistance of Russia. He says plainly in his Memoirs that his policy was to prevent any settlement of the Russo-Polish question, which would necessarily embarrass Prussia in dealing with her own

Polish subjects; at the same time, he was prepared to incur, as he actually did, the reproaches of the whole of Western Europe, who were sympathetic to the Poles, to secure that alliance with Russia which Frederick laid down as essential to Prussian policy.

The result was disastrous to Polish aspirations, and, although the Prussian Poles were not to feel the hand of the Iron Chancellor as yet—occupied as he was with other problems—yet the beginning of the real persecutions of Polish nationality is found in the reprisals of Russia after the revolt of 1863. The language was forbidden in the higher schools; the Catholic religion—always a bone of contention between the Poles and their Orthodox conquerors—was subjected to disabilities; all government offices were closed to Poles; a bigoted Russian bureaucracy ruled the country with an iron hand. Fortunately for the Poles, this dark period was lightened by the good fortune which now befell that portion of their race which had come under Austrian rule. We have seen that Austria, after annexing Cracow, embarked on a policy of repression, and for some fourteen years the one idea was to sit on the safety-valve. But at length it became obvious to Francis Joseph that his throne could not rest any longer on this unstable foundation, and as a bold remedy he determined to adopt a constitution in place of his original autocratic form of government. The constitution of 1860 and 1862 aroused the hopes of the Poles of Galicia, but it was only after the defeat of Austria in 1866 that they were able to secure any real measure of liberty. They had suffered frightfully after the revolt of 1846, for Austria had called to her aid the Ruthenian peasantry of Galicia, who, hating their Polish landlords, were quite ready to join in a *jacquerie* and, being given a free hand, plundered and ravaged the estates of the Poles. The dislike existing between the landowning and peasant classes, between which the Jews act as intermediaries, is still a characteristic of Galicia. When Austria established a *Reichsrath*, in which all the subject peoples were to be represented, the Poles, being the educated and landowning class in Galicia, captured all the seats and, acting solidly together in Parliament, were able to sell their support to the Government (frequently hard put to it to get a working majority) for vital concessions in the way of autonomy. Consequently, the Austrian Poles are now freer than any others. They have their own Diet, a Polish Viceroy, police, government service and complete liberty.

of language. The darkest period for the Russian Poles, therefore, synchronized with the dawn of hope in Austria, and the spark of nationality has not only been kept alive, but has kindled anew in the last forty years.

At Cracow the "Real" policy, which has been so successful in Austrian Poland, was initiated, and here the paper called the "All Polish Review" became the standard and rallying-point of the disinherited Poles. The main factor, however, in the development of Russian Poland has been the industrialization of Russia. Russian Poland contains iron and coal. She has become the *entrepôt* of a great trade, and a middle class and working class have sprung up of quite a different calibre to the aristocracy and peasants who formed the Polish nation of old. The consequence of this economic development is to make Poland and Russia mutually dependent, and to create a genuine bond. The downfall of France in 1870 helped to weaken the revolutionary movement, and modern Poland is represented in the Russian Duma by the National Democratic party, whose aims are not separatist, and whose policy is similar to that of the "Realists" in Austria in desiring autonomy and reform without revolution. So far the Russian Government has not met this conciliatory movement in a friendly spirit. The Poles, acting together, were able to acquire great influence in the first and second Dumas, and as a lesson to them their representation was cut down by half. M. Stolypin has considered their programme and declines to assent to it. Liberal opinion in Russia has hardly yet found a means of expression, but when it does it will certainly be found to be strongly in favor of conciliation to Poland—a policy already supported by many statesmen and publicists of all parties. The genuineness of the professions of the National Democrats as to their loyalty to the Russian Crown may be tested by the fact that during the period of revolution which followed the Russo-Japanese War there was no serious outbreak in Poland.

Bismarck, as has been said, was too much occupied for many years, even after the victories of 1870, to turn his attention seriously to the Polish question, but that he never lost sight of its paramount importance is shown by many references in his Memoirs. Polish writers declare that the partition of Poland would never have been consummated had it not seemed to Prussia that the Poles were on the point of developing those liberal ideas

which had begun to spread from France. In 1848, say the Polish patriots, the Prussian Government actually encouraged the rising, and distributed arms from the Berlin arsenal to a Polish legion, knowing well that the Russian Government would take alarm at what appeared like an anti-monarchical movement. The Machiavellian design was to strengthen the hands of that party in Russia which was opposed to Pan-Slavism and to Liberalism, and in this, as we have seen, Prussia eventually succeeded. The scheme of Germanization devised by Bismarck was twofold, economic and mental, and aimed at reducing the number of Polish landlords and peasants and at banishing the Polish tongue from public life and from the schools. But not till 1873 did a definite policy shape itself as regards the language, and it was thirteen years before Prussia was in a position to take measures for enforcing the scheme. One reason for this long delay (apart from the pre-occupation of Bismarck with a succession of domestic difficulties—the *Kulturkampf*, the struggle against free trade, and the coercion laws against social Democracy) was undoubtedly the heavy expenditure involved by a project which amounted to nothing less than this—that the Poles should be bought out of their own country, and that such as could not be got rid of by these means should be deprived of their nationality by the simple means of making them speak German. The combination of a cultural and economic campaign was throughout Bismarck's idea, but it was only four years before his dismissal, when the Franco-Russian alliance was looming on the horizon, that the Germanization of the Polish provinces began in earnest and the Prussian Diet voted five millions sterling for the purpose of settling Germans in the Polish provinces and developing the country. In 1898 a further grant was made, and in 1902 the total was made up to twenty-two and a half millions sterling. The whole aim was to plant a prosperous and permanent German population on the soil, and thus to oust or assimilate the Poles. The eastern provinces were to be stamped deep with the Prussian impress. The policy was actively encouraged by Bismarck after his retirement, and Prince von Bülow expressed his belief in its importance in the striking sentence in his "Polish speech" of 1902: "I regard the Eastern Provinces question not only as one of the most important . . . but as eminently the one on whose solution the immediate future of our Fatherland depends."

What is the result of the determined effort to solve the Polish problem? Up to the end of 1906, after an expenditure of seventeen and a half millions sterling, it is estimated that not more than 75,000 acres have actually passed from Polish hands into those of Germans. The Poles have a Settlement Commission of their own, operating through their Land Bank, agricultural co-operative societies and other patriotic agencies, which are all prosperous business concerns paying high dividends. The price of land has risen to a point where the German landlords find it a great temptation to sell to the Poles, especially as they encounter hostility among their Polish neighbors. Any Pole selling to a German is ruthlessly boycotted. There are not wanting critics who declare that the Settlement Commission has been exploited by friends and relations with land to sell, and has besides consumed an enormous amount in salaries and working expenses; but, whatever may be the causes, the fact remains that one quarter of the National Debt of Prussia is due to the anti-Polish policy.

Meanwhile, the attempt on the Polish language has had little more success. All Europe was amused—and pained—at the spectacle of a great kingdom like Prussia fuming and fulminating with rage while 50,000 school children upset the whole course of law by refusing to say their prayers in German! The Polish population of the Ostmark increased ten and a half per cent. between 1890 and 1900, and since that date the Parliamentary vote cast by the Poles has risen rapidly, from 342,784 in 1903 to 453,774 in 1907. Socially, the Poles hold their own easily; and, owing to the boycott of German professional men and traders, a Polish middle class has risen and is prospering. Inter-marriage means that the children, almost invariably, are brought up with Polish ideas. "Experience teaches," said Bismarck, "that a Polish wife makes her husband a Polish patriot in the twinkling of an eye." In short, we find this extraordinary anomaly—by no means rare, however—that the conquered race is proving stronger than its conqueror.

The latest move in the game is a Bill for compulsorily expropriating Polish landowners—an eloquent testimony to the failure of the more legitimate scheme. This Bill, which passed amid the execration of all men of liberal views, has not yet been put into operation, but the national policy is to be pursued "vigorous-

ly and persistently." Bülow's excuse for the Bill was that it was the only hope of introducing landowners of German nationality, but even this forced settlement will not insure the Germanization of these provinces, which the Royal Speech at the opening of the Prussian Diet on January 7th, 1907, declared to be "the historic mission of Prussia."

The vital nature of this problem to Prussia will be realized when one remembers the weakness of her eastern frontier—an artificial boundary of 750 miles (on a lowland plain, with no natural obstruction), coterminous with Russia. A wedge of Russian territory runs in at one point and the frontier here is only 180 miles from Berlin. A chain of fortresses has been established; but, to render these anything more than mere bases, the rear must be secured, and here is the immovable, hostile Polish population, which would be a factor of incalculable danger in case of invasion. Recognizing that Prussia could not satisfy her Polish subjects without disintegrating her own territory, Bismarck determined that the only safeguard was to see that the Russian Poles were kept equally discontented. How much of Russian policy has been suggested from Berlin may never be known, but the bureaucracy of Russia has also owed much to North German inspiration through the numerous Germans of the Baltic provinces who have taken service under the Tsar. The whole force of this influence has been reactionary, and Russian Liberalism has no greater foe, even in the autocratic circles of St. Petersburg, than Prussia, the head of an Empire once foremost in spreading Liberal ideas.

The part played in the Polish question by the recent development of the Pan-Slav propaganda is as yet obscure, but it is certain that Prussia will find it difficult to deal with this new phase. The old Pan-Slavist movement, with its ideal of Russia as the head of the Slavs—essentially an orthodox bureaucratic conception—found no echo in Polish breasts. It is said that certain tribes, hostile to each other under ordinary circumstances, will rally at the "call of the blood," and this is becoming more and more true of the Slavs as they achieve a fuller degree of national consciousness. The Poles, who cherished the idea of national independence until recent years, and who are Catholic and influenced by French theories of political life, could not accept the hegemony of Russia, even from a cultural point of view, so long as Pan-

Slavism meant a recognition of Holy Russia, orthodox and bureaucratic, as the Slav ideal. The modern Slav movement, however, known as Neo-Slavism, originating chiefly from Bohemia, is less political and yet more practical in design than the older propaganda. It constitutes a "call of the blood," but on broad grounds which compromise no national dignities and, instead of emanating from Russian official sources, it makes its appeal to Russian Liberals, who, in responding to it, have expressed their acquiescence in the claims of Poland to national liberty within the Russian Empire. A Bohemian delegate to the second Neo-Slav conference told his Russian hearers that justice to the Poles is essential to Slav unity and progress.

The apparent consolidation of the two great Teutonic States of Central Europe gives practically one Power stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic, and possibly to the Ægean. The military efficiency, and the naval potentialities, of this alliance enable it to set on one side considerations based on those pacific *ententes* which of recent years have been multiplied in the hope of avoiding international collisions. Once more Europe is faced with the crude assertion that Might is Right, and the immediate result has been to plunge all the European nations into a sea of unrest. For a long period Austria, whose population is predominantly Slav, although her ruling House is Teutonic, has held the scales between Teuton and Slav and has thus preserved the balance of power. Now she has thrown herself violently into the Teutonic scale, and, having been the only Power to grant autonomy to the Slavs, is now posing not as a deliverer, but as an oppressor — for the Austrian policy in Bosnia - Herzegovina is definitely anti-national and oppressive. She is, in fact, committed to the Prussian programme. The other half of the Dual Monarchy, Hungary, is ruled by a Magyar oligarchy who in a mad fit of Chauvinism have so alienated their Slav subjects (also a large proportion of the Hungarian nation) that they are now bound to rely on German support or see "the Magyar State ideal" swallowed in the Slav sea by which it is surrounded.

This apparent solidarity of interest and purpose is all directed to the furtherance of Prussian policy. The Germany which existed before 1870, with its liberalism, pacific tendencies and high spiritual ideals, has disappeared before the march of industrialization, materialism and militarism. Prussia has dictated the

national ideals, as she dictates the foreign policy, of the German nation. With regard to the Slavs, we have seen that that policy has two canons—to divide the smaller Slav nations and to keep friendly with the big one. The latter half of this policy has only been possible because the Government of Russia has never represented the sense of the people. It is becoming increasingly difficult, and the humiliation recently inflicted on Russia was felt by both Government and people. The former may overlook it, but not the latter. The inherent weakness in the Prussian position is that it depends, in the long run, on the permanent subjection of that stubborn Slav race feeling which has survived centuries of oppression, and which in the process has learned how to hold its own in the teeth of superior organization.

Will the Slavs respond to the “call of the blood”? Whether or no, it is plain that the Polish question, the pivot on which Russo-German and Austro-German relations depend, is by no means settled, and still remains the Achilles heel of Prussia and of the Teutonic hegemony.

ARCHIBALD R. COLQUHOUN.